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ABSTRACT

Much revisionist scholarship has focused on sophistic epistemology and its relationship to the current revival of epistemic rhetoric in the academy. However, few scholars have recognized the sensuous substance of words as sounds, and the role it played in sophistic philosophy and rhetoric. Before the invention of the Greek alphabet, poetry was central to Greek education and culture. Rhythm and meter served to fix knowledge in the memory through its pleasurable affiliation with music and the somatic response of motor reflexes. The orality of speech, not the visuality of text was the ontological basis of the sophistic philosophy of knowledge. Gorgias, like many sophists, rejected the Platonic realm of ideal Forms, in favor of a view of knowledge based upon speech. For Gorgias, there was no necessary correspondence between language and reality, so valid contradictory statements about phenomena were possible. It was the unity of thought and language, though uncertain, that made knowledge possible. Cicero, like the sophists, saw language and thought as inextricably bound. He further conceived of oratory style and delivery in terms of music. The ancient Greeks recognized hearing as the most emotional of the senses. Today, some scholars see a connection between emotion, thought, and language, and it is held that this connection has implications for the teaching of writing. (Twenty-two references are attached.) (SG)

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1989 Conference on College Composition and Communication
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"The Muse never became the discarded mistress of Greece.
She learned to write and read while still continuing to sing"

--Havelock, The Muse Learns to Write 23.

Much revisionist scholarship has been concerned with sophistic epistemology, and its relationship to current revival of epistemic rhetoric. However, outside Professor Enos, few scholars have recognized what I will call "the music of language," the sensuous substance of words as sound, and the role it played in sophistic philosophy and rhetoric. As W. B. Stanford discusses in The Sound of Greek: Studies in the Greek Theory and Practice of Euphony, classical scholars and rhetoricians continue to ignore and dismiss the affective, sensuous dimension of language as unworthy of study (80). In fact, this dimension of language has been denigrated and neglected in rhetorical theory since Plato and Aristotle, who rejected the affective, sensuous forms of language--at least in theory--in favor of philosophical method and rational heuristics. In the history of rhetoric, Aristotle and Plato thus mark a transition from the poetic, non-rational approach to knowledge of the poets and rhapsodes, to the non-poetic, rational approach of the subsequent rhetorical tradition in which sophistic style has been seen as excessive, deceptive, showy, unethical, useless.

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The transition from poetic, non-rational prose to non-poetic, rational prose is of course intimately tied to the shift from orality to literacy. However, as Professor Enos implies in "The Composing Process of the Sophists," the shift was made neither simply nor cleanly. In fact, in the history of rhetoric, the sophists can be seen as representing not only an opposing epistemology to that of Plato and Aristotle, but an opposing tradition of writing as well which links poetry and rhetoric. In the first part of this paper I will briefly trace that poetic tradition of rhetoric in which the music of language was epistemic--a way of coming to know--from the pivotal early sophists up through Cicero, whose later rhetorical treatises I believe represent the mature culmination of the sophistic position. In the second part of this paper, I will explore what the epistemic language of music is. In addition to recent revisionist scholarship on the sophists, I will have recourse to refer to work in contemporary philosophy of music as well as the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer in an attempt to elucidate the epistemic music of language. Finally, I will suggest some of the implications of the epistemic music of language for the current revival of the epistemic trend in rhetoric, and for the teaching of writing in general.

It is now a well known fact that before the invention of the Greek alphabet around 720-700 BC, and its interiorization around 500 BC, poetry was central to Greek education and culture. Based on the work of Parry and Lord, Eric Havelock has demonstrated that in the primary oral culture which existed in early Greece, poetry was the primary mode for the retention and transmission of knowledge. As Havelock discusses in Preface to Plato (145-164), rhythm and meter served to fix knowledge in

the memory through its pleasurable affiliation with music, as well as through the somatic response of motor reflexes. That is, rhythm and meter involve not only sound, but the manipulation of speech organs and stimulation of muscles and nervous system, and so serve to make knowledge sensually physical. According to Havelock, an audience under the spell of a recitation by poet or rhapsode was able to physically identify with and participate in "the message," and "imitate" it in a remembered mimesis of music. Rhythm and meter inscribe knowledge not only in memory, but also "in the muscles." Likewise, Stanford discusses in great detail "the power of words to imitate and embody ideas and emotions" (115) in ancient Greek literature, investigating not only rhythm and meter, but other musical qualities of ancient Greek as well, such as speed of delivery, intensity, timbre-quality or sound texture, and pitch variation or word melody.

Although Havelock suggests that in the chronological march from orality to literacy, the sophists began the search for a "new level of discourse (logos) and a virtuosity of conceptual vocabularly" (Preface 304), he also states that the attempt "to rearrange experience in categories rather than events was first attempted and for long continued within the confines of rhythm" (294-5). Stanford also points out that the early sophists explored the sounds of words in great detail and depth, and how a "prose-speaker could use effects of rhythm and assonance to influence his audience" (9). More importantly, however, the centrality of the affective, sensuous language of the poets in shaping human knowledge, understanding and the perception of reality itself was fundamental for the early sophists. In "Rhetorical Theory and Sophistic Composition: A Reconstruction," Professor Enos explores the relationship between the sophistic conception of style as indirect

knowledge and their epistemology that emphasized "relativism, sense-perception, and probability" (1). "The sophistic tradition...did not stress an abstract system of heuristics but gave pre-eminence to poetic composition..." (4). Professor Enos states that Empedocles believed, contra Plato, "that awareness through sense-perception was the only legitimate way of coming to know," albeit sense perceptions are limited, and the knowledge uncertain. Thus, says Enos, the dissoi logoi, (or two-oppposed logoi in which one argued both sides of an issue) "was a convention for coming to know, not rationally but stylistically. Similarly, analogical thought in general, and metaphor in particular, is not realized through a rational process but, if effective, is apprehended immediately" (10).

In an oral culture, experience is arranged according to what Havelock calls "the language of senses" (Preface 210). But the sense through which that language enters is the ear, not the eye. The orality of speech, not the visuality of text, is the ontological basis of the sophistic philosophy of knowledge. In an oral culture, says Ong, knowledge is additive, rather than subordinated, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant and copious rather than innovative and sparse, formulaic rather than original, agonistically toned rather than neutral, empathetic and participatory rather than objective and distanced, situational rather than abstract--just as this sentence is (Orality 37-57). As Ong discusses, unlike sight, which dissects, separates, sound surrounds, penetrates (72). Ong on the interiority of sound: sound has "a unique relationship to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses. This relationship is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself"

(72). The epistemic music of language is rooted in the substance of words as sound. Alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhythm, meter, rhyme. Repetition and variation of sound in time.

It is also a well known that Gorgias, like many of the sophists, adopted and exploited the highly rhythmic, paratactic style of the poets and rhapsodes. As Professor Enos demonstrates in "The Epistemology of Gorgias Rhetoric: A Re-Examination," Gorgias' use of the poetic style was also related to questions of epistemology. Based on the dictum that Being does not exist, that if it did we could not know it, and that if we knew it, we could not communicate it, for Gorgias too, knowledge was based on sense perceptions, and that those sense perceptions and thus human knowledge itself are limited, probable, relative, contingent, uncertain. Since there is no Platonic realm of ideal Forms to which to refer, all knowledge for Gorgias is based on speech, which according to Professor Enos enters at the level of the senses, stimulates sensory reactions through the metaphorical power of words, and thus evokes emotional responses which are necessary to "deceive" the senses and persuade the listener into believing that one argument is truer than another (48-49). For Gorgias, style and emotions are fundamental to knowing, rather than an "'irrational' sensation," as they are for Plato (Enos, "Epistemology" 42), or "a defect in our hearers," as they are for Aristotle (Rhetoric III, I: 8-9).

For G. B. Kerferd, Gorgias' dictum is a problem of predication. According to Kerferd in The Sophistic Movement, Protagoras' doctrine of the dissoi-logoi, or two-opposed-statements, concern propositions about qualities of phenomena, about attributes and characteristics, rather than the actual phenomena (94). The epistemological problem for Kerferd is the nature of phenomena, not the existence of nature. Since it is in

and through language that one predicates the nature or qualities of things, the epistemological issue hinges on the definition of logos, the correspondence between word and thing. The dominant assumption in ancient Greek philosophy was that the word and the thing were one and the same (Kerferd, Sophistic Movement 73). Thus, in The Cratylus, Plato explores the theory of origin and nature of language as sound which held that the sound of letters and words were directly related to the objects they represent, which theory Socrates ultimately dismisses as inconsistent and ludicrous (esp. 422b-440d). For Plato, there is a one-to-one correspondence between word and thing, but between name (as visual sign) and essence (or idea), not sound (389d-393d). As Kerferd reports, for Plato, "to each segment of reality there belongs just one logos and to each logos there answers just one segment of reality" (71).

However, for Gorgias, there was apparently no correspondence between language and reality, either as visual sign or sound. At first this may seem surprising. But for Gorgias, words bear no physical resemblance or direct relationship to the reality they purport to describe or explain. Contradictory statements about phenomena were possible and equally valid (though not necessarily true) precisely because words do not share the properties of the phenomenon they are about. According to Kerferd, the same problem pertains to the relationship between phenomenon and thought (97). Contradictions between phenomena and thought are also inevitable, since thoughts cannot be of the same nature or quality as the objects thought about. Thus, we can neither think about nor communicate accurate knowledge of an object in reality, but rather must "deceive" listeners into believing one

statement over another. Gorgias dictum as interpreted by Kerferd only involves a gulf between thought and reality, and between language and reality, not between language and thought. It is the unity of thought and language, that makes the predication, communication, persuasion, and belief--in short, knowledge--possible at all, albeit uncertain. Is it possible, then, that the sophists thought that the sensuous music of language is related to thought? I will return to this question in the second part of this paper.

In this radical epistemic view of the sophists, the necessity and power of poetic language to create not through versimilitude, but through the metaphorical and musical property of words, the sensory "illusion" of attributes in a powerfully persuasive simulacrum of reality, is necessary for belief, knowledge, and action. It was probably due to this radical position that Gorgias and the sophists in general were denigrated by Plato and Aristotle, and dismissed by history. Neither Plato nor Aristotle ultimately gave much credence to sophistry or poetry (which is to say, they did not recognize them as a legitimate forms of knowledge).

Thus, in the transition from orality to literacy, the gradual movement from primary (oral) rhetoric to literary (written rhetoric), there was really two traditions of writing. There was the non-poetic Attic plain style more or less institutionalized by Plato and Aristotle. And there was the poetic, musical style transfered to prose by the sophists that can be seen to survive and develop relatively intact at least through Isocrates and the "Assiatic" Cicero. According to Werner Jaegar in "The Rhetoric of Isocrates and its Cultural Ideal," Isocrates, who wrote contemporaneously with Plato, was "a genuine sophist" (48), "the post-war representative of the sophistic and rhetorical culture

which had flourished in the Periclean period" (49). Isocrates was a pupil of both Protagoras and Gorgias (48), and it is generally acknowledged that Gorgias' "literary" style heavily influenced Isocrates.

But it was perhaps a fortuitous accident of both personality and history that Isocrates was not a good speaker (Isocrates wrote and published his speeches, and only declaimed them for his students), for Isocrates thus facilitated the transition of poetry to prose, the development of a "literary" rhetoric that retained and continued the musical modes of intuitive thought in an age of growing literacy (e.g. Jaeger, "Isocrates" 63-65). As Jaeger discusses, "Just as the sophists believed themselves to be the true successors of the poets, whose special art they had transferred into prose, so Isocrates too feels that he is continuing the poets' work, and taking over the function which until a short time before him they had fulfilled in the life of his nation.... dynastic succession of rhetoric to poetry remained the true image of the spiritual process in which rhetoric arose as a new cultural force...." ("Isocrates" 62).

For the most part, in treatments of the classical rhetorical tradition, Cicero has not been thought of as a descendent of the sophists, but rather as an Aristotelain, or as a technical rhetorician. However, in his later treatises Cicero borrows heavily from and acknowledges his debt to Isocrates (and other sophists), as well as Plato and Aristotle, the former with whom he also fundamentally disagrees. In De Oratore, Cicero, unlike Plato and Aristotle, makes no separation between rhetoric and philosophy, between style and substance. For Cicero, as for Isocrates and the sophists, language and thought are inextricably bound

together in an essential unity (III, v. 19 - vii. 26). It is in this context that Crassus talks about the necessity of poetic rhythm and meter in oratory. For Cicero, as for the sophists, rhythm is more than a matter of aesthetic pleasure. The rhythms and sounds of words represent the basis for an intuitive form of wisdom (III, l. 195-197).

It also is clear that Cicero conceives of style and delivery in terms of music. In the Orator, Cicero advises: "...let art follow the leadership of nature in pleasing the ear....The superior orator will therefore vary and modulate his voice; now raising, now lowering it, he will run through the whole scale of tones" (xvii. 58-59). And in his discussion of delivery as a kind of vocal performance, in which there are "three registers, high, low, and intermediate" (xvii. 57), perhaps we are even hearing the musical parallel of the plain, middle, and grand styles corresponding to the functions of instructing, delighting, and moving an audience. Thus, Cicero takes the poetic style of sophistic oratory one step further by applying the concept of propriety to it, which for Cicero is "the foundation of eloquence" (Orator xx. 70). For Cicero, the greatest orator is the one who is capable of achieving the grand style, which can be learned from the poets, although he must command the middle style, which Cicero associates with the sophists, as well as the plain, or Attic style--and know when and how to use them in any given speech (Orator xx. 69 - xxviii. 99). But style at all levels must appeal to the senses, and so must be musical--even in prose.

Speech is predominately referential. What, then, is the nature of the epistemic music of language? What is it? If the referential meaning of language is rooted in the dimension of space, the epistemic music of language is rooted in the dimension of time. It is non-referential. As Victor Zuckerkandl explains in Sound and Symbol: Music

and the External World, the essence (and meaning) of music as an aural phenomenon is motion in time. But if the music of language is epistemic, a temporal way of perceiving and understanding, what kind of perception, what kind of understanding does that music provide? What kind of knowledge is temporal knowledge?

As Stanford states, the ancient Greeks themselves recognized hearing as the most emotional, "passionate" of the five senses, since that sense "depends on perceptible movements and rhythms; these, it is assumed, are akin to emotional perturbations" (79). Stanford sees a relationship between this and the Greek theory of cartharsis, the restoring of harmony and balance to the emotions (92). In Emotion and Meaning in Music, Leonard Meyer also believes that emotion are the result of the inhibition of sensory drives and their subsequent release, created through meaningful patterns that manifest themselves in music. "Emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested," Meyer says (14). His discussion thus may help us understand what the sophists knew by intuition and experience in an oral culture. Musical patterns over auditory time determine the direction of the emotional tendency. As stimulus, says Meyer, music "activates tendencies, inhibits them, and provides meaningful resolutions" (23). Through musical patterns, expectations, which are conscious or subconscious emotional tendencies, may be blocked by being directly inhibited, complicated with other expectations, augmented, totally reversed, temporarily delayed, indefinitely suspended, ambiguous, non-specific, or doubtful either originally or in their fulfillment (25-30).

The result of these conflicts for Meyer "is not only affect, as a product of inhibition, but doubt, confusion, and uncertainty," which

create further desire for clarity, resolution, and certainty (15-16). For Meyer, expectations, and the conscious effects that they give rise to, such as suspense, surprise, frustration, doubt, anxiety, and uncertainty, are the meaning of music (35). As I. A. Richards argued in Principles of Literary Criticism many years ago, affect and emotion are a form of knowledge--they tell us how we feel about events, literary or otherwise, and thus underlie our knowledge of the world (98-102). But the important point here is that affect is created through style as patterns of sound as well as content. The knowledge that style communicates as an aural phenomenon is temporal knowledge. And since temporal knowledge is nonreferential knowledge, it is uncertain knowledge. As Meyer implies throughout, temporal knowledge is not only uncertain knowledge, but a knowledge of uncertainty itself.

In The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Cassirer discusses the unity of sensous form and intellectual content of language as an expressive movement in consciousness in a way that also might help us further understand the relationship between sound and thought that is at least implied by the sophistic philosophy of language and knowledge discussed earlier. Cassirer explores the relationship between the dynamic of speech and the dynamics of feeling and emotion. Language for Cassirer is not only referential signs for objective reality, but also for "emotional signs for sensuous drives and stimuli" that are stamped on language in the process of "symbolization" (148). Like Meyer, Cassirer believes that feelings and emotions are originally the result of natural drives and motiviations that are inhibited and thus raised into consciousness (178-180). However, for Cassirer, these feelings and emotions are embodied in and "imprinted" on language as an organic, physical, "sensuous form" that is fundamental to thought. For Cassirer,

language is the sensuous symbolic form through which objects are first apprehended and perceived. Language is, Cassirer states, "the synthetic structure of consciousness itself, through which the world of sensation becomes a world of intuition" (153).

The mimesis of feeling and emotion that is stamped on language as a sensuous form, as sound may be the basis of the kinaesthetic, affective sense of spoken words. Not only, then, does a recognition of the music of language perhaps increase our understanding of sophistic rhetoric, but it also may provide the material grounds--in sound--for the current revival of the epistemic rhetoric. Just as New Physics has recognized time as a fourth dimension of reality, so perhaps rhetoricians need to recognize time as a dimension of meaning in language. As an oral event in time, rhetoric must at some level be poetic, musical. As Ong states, because of the primacy of speech, even in our literate high tech age, writing must be converted to sound to be meaningful, to be understood (Orality 8). The residue of orality still lingers in written text, and may still be important, if not fundamental, to language as epistemic, as a temporal mode of perceiving and understanding meaning.

If we recognize and give some credence to the role of epistemic music in rhetoric, there are many implications for the teaching of writing as well. I'll only touch on a couple here. Based on Polyani's notion of tacit knowledge (Personal Knowledge), in "Understanding Composing" Sondra Perl explores the role of voice in writing as "felt sense." In "Piaget, Problem-Solving, and Freshman Composition," Lee Odell explores the need to get students to listen to the dissonance and disequilibrium they feel during the process of writing. Much like Meyer, Odell says that dissonance and disequilibrium, underlie "all

human activities" (36), and are the result of the relative nature of all human knowledge, which "is subject to continual revision" (37). In "Shifting Relations Between Speech and Writing," Elbow also understands dissonance or disequilibrium to be essential by-products of the uncertainty of knowledge, and sees the problem with teaching students to write as one of getting them to listen to their affective dissonance, their emotional disequilibrium. Could it be that "felt sense," that "disequilibrium," are oral and temporal, are the result of the epistemic music of language? Could it be, as Zuckerkandl asks, that "...what is taking place here if not a comprehensive musicalization of thought, a change of orientation under the aegis of new images, of time images, a change that seems to be opening new roads to our understanding and indeed, to our logic?" (264).

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